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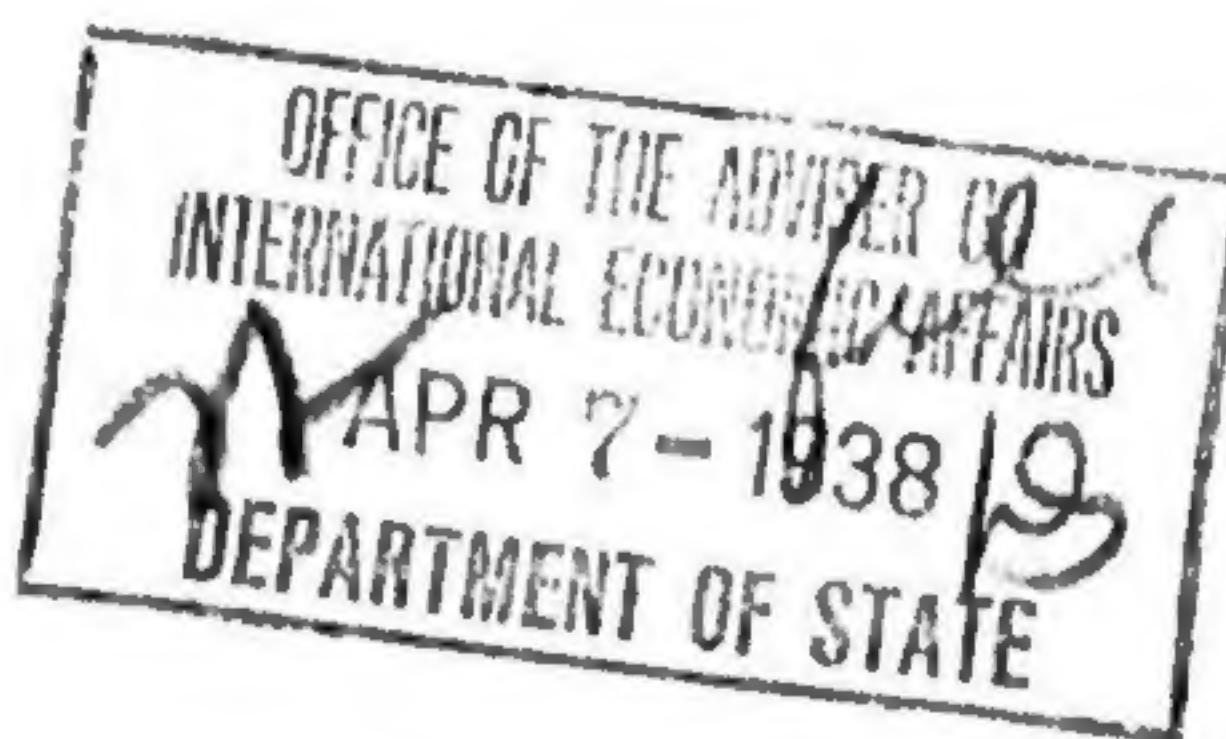
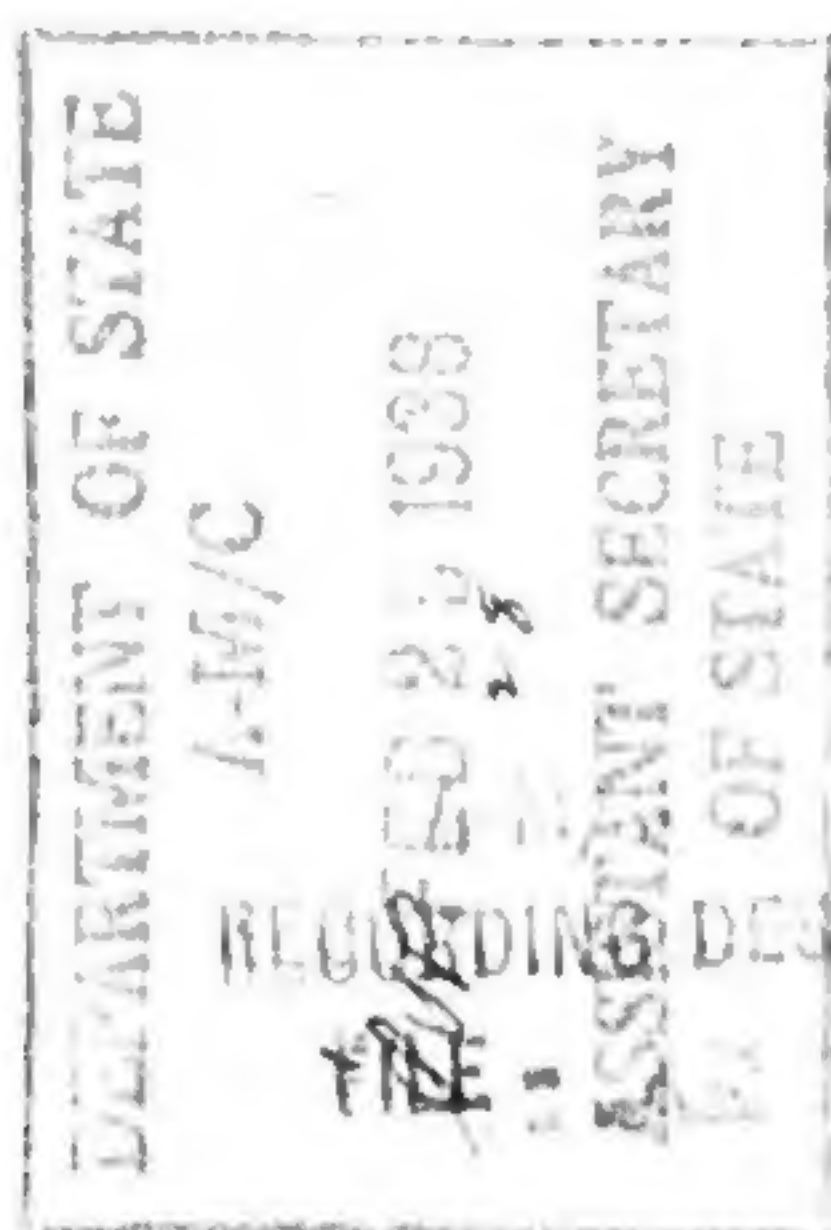
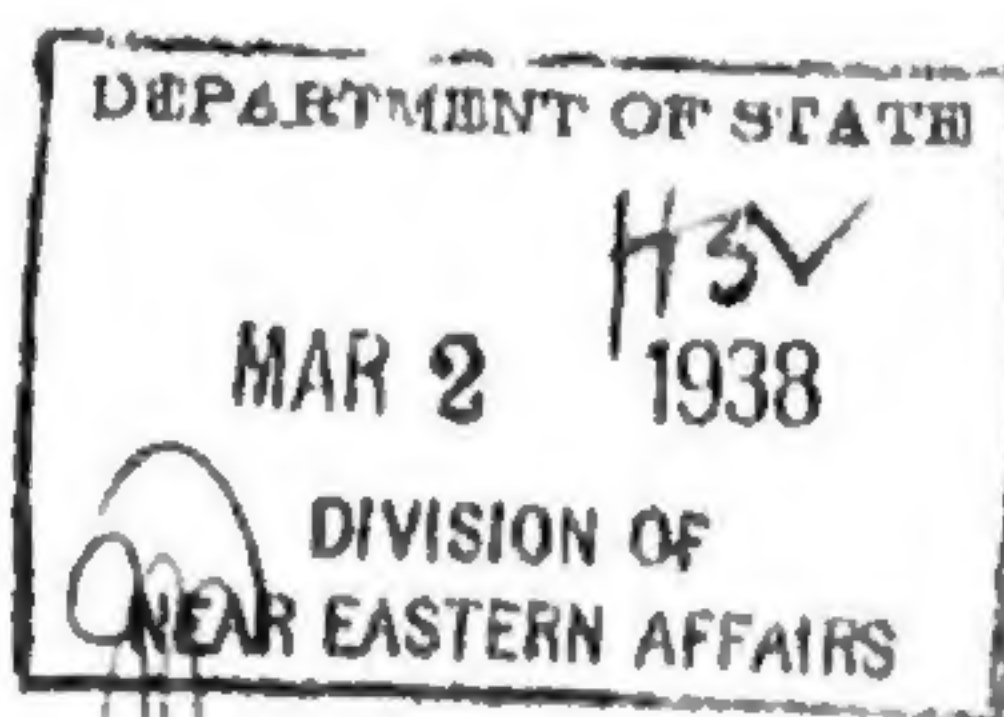
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ECONOMIC ORGANIZATION IN FRENCH
EQUATORIAL AFRICA .

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APR 9 1938

(For the Department of Commerce)

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Paris, France.

Date of Completion: February 7, 1938

Date of Mailing: February 8, 1938.

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French Equatorial Africa, although in general capable of unity in economic structure, has the usual characteristics of most of Africa, that is, it consists of vast uninhabited areas (lakes, lagoons, sandy wastes, mountains, wide rivers, forests), containing relatively small islands of population. These islands are found along the rivers, in open savannahs, in areas of fertile ground, or along the borders of forests. It is estimated that the total inhabited area of the colony is not more than 700-800,000 square kilometers (about 300,000 square miles) little more than the area of the island of Madagascar, while the population is also nearly the same, being roughly 3,500,000 inhabitants.

The natural resources are, however, of considerable potential importance. Forest areas are more than 400,000 square kilometers (roughly 150,000 square miles) in extent and constitute at present the principal wealth of the colonies. Palm groves cover an area of some 50,000 square kilometers and contain more than 100 million trees. Mineral resources include gold, diamonds, copper, zinc, lead, phosphates and petroleum.

The native population is considered to have as good possibilities for development as in other regions of Africa.

Difficulties of Organization.

The greatest difficulty which must be overcome before the region is successfully organized is the

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lack of roads and means of communication and the consequent difficulties of transportation. An extensive program of road building and river improvement is now under way.

Among other important drawbacks to development should be mentioned the unequal distribution of productive activity, such as the predominance of forest timber and wild products such as rubber, kapok, etc. gathered from indefinite, non-cultivated areas; forced labor of the natives or restraints against them; the practice of collective cultivation and collective payments; the custom by which tribal chiefs receive a certain payment on all products sold from their villages or districts. All of these factors tend to work against the establishment of settlers and colonists in numbers sufficient for adequate exploitation. The original population being sparse, and the small numbers of Europeans being unfit for manual labor because of the climate, one of the chief problems of any projected exploitation is the supply of labor. Its scarcity is the chief cause for lack of progress in many areas. Economy of effort and mechanization wherever possible are therefore of great importance, but the introduction of these apparently can make but slow progress.

Attitude Toward Natives.

As the great bulk of the population consists of and probably always will consist of African natives,

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the attitude toward them and the means adopted toward their development is of prime consideration. At present the official attitude of the colonial government is that exploitation of the country shall not take place at the expense of the native worker.

An important aim in this connection is that of providing a sufficient and properly balanced food supply for the natives. The basic food of three fourths of the population of the region is manioc which provides too starchy a diet and is recognized as largely the cause of the poor physical condition of many native tribes. A definite program is underway to teach these peoples to raise varied types of fruits, vegetables and other foods supplying a balanced diet.

Forced native labor has now been practically prohibited and this tendency has met with opposition from only a few proprietors. These use the argument that coercion is necessary to make a native perform more than the most necessary tasks and that he has no ambition toward betterment or improvement. Those opposed to forced labor argue that production has increased each year in all fields of production, whether cultivated, gathered, or forest products are concerned, as well as in stockraising and mining operations, in spite of the fact that such labor is no longer used.

Improvement of Conditions of Production.

The two primary factors in the improvement of conditions of production are: the extension of the zone of cultivation, and of even more importance, increase in the yield of a given area.

Extension of the zone of cultivation depends mainly upon the number of workers, so that any extension of areas must continually take this into consideration. Emphasis should rather be placed on obtaining the maximum from a given area at a minimum of expense.

An important question is the form of cultivation carried on, that is whether given areas should be cultivated collectively or by individuals or families. In the structure of native organization, collective cultivation in reality does not exist. Under their system, in each tribe or in each village the proprietorship of the soil is collective or communal, but in this common holding each individual has the right to select his own piece of ground and develop or cultivate it as he sees fit. He may have his field of ground-nuts, of corn, of manioc, of beans, or of bananas according to his needs. There is never any question as to his rights to such cultivation.

The French have introduced the idea of a collectivity, usually in the form of a "champ du commandant" or proprietor's field, and this is said to be one of the sore spots in the life of native farmers who work

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on it with great repugnance, if not hostility.

A usual practice considered detrimental to proper development is the method of payment for crops, in the form of collective payments to village chiefs who receive all the money resulting from the sale of a crop, pay the village or district taxes therefrom and keep a good share of the profit for themselves. The result is that the individual farmer seldom receives adequate income from his labors. As many crops, notably cotton, have long been paid for in bulk, a difficulty encountered in individual payment is the shortage of small denominations of money. Only after ordering large quantities of coins from France has the policy of individual payment gotten under way.

The number of small markets has been considerably increased, thus reducing the amount of prior transportation necessary as well as providing more effective methods of control.

Aid to Colonists.

Colonists or settlers from Europe have not been numerous but those who arrive need guidance in many ways, in the choice of land, in the choice of crops, in the type of seeds. In April 1936, an agricultural service was established for these and other ends. This service is intended to develop and determine the most fitting types of both food crops and export crops and

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to introduce new ones; it is to improve methods of cultivation and the preparation of crops for market; it is to establish colonization regions and zones adaptable to each crop, in cooperation with local authorities. It will benefit natives as well as Europeans.

Société de Prévoyance.

These organizations, the name of which might be translated as "welfare societies" or "farmers' aid societies", and which have existed for some time in the French West African Colonies, are only being started in Equatorial Africa. Nine, in several of the more important production areas, were to be started during 1937, and several more have been recently decreed. The general purposes of these societies are to educate the natives in better methods of cultivation and a more scientific organization of production, to improve the quality and appearance of products, also to develop the use of machinery. These societies are also to organize rational methods of transportation and will aid in the problem of agricultural credits. In short, they are intended to be organizations which the native farmer can call upon for many forms of help and advice.

Water Supply and Irrigation.

Problems of water supply have scarcely ever been studied in French Equatorial Africa. About the
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only thing that has been done is the digging of a number of wells in the Tchad colony.

The water resources of the colony are such that irrigation would be possible everywhere except in the extreme north of Tchad, and in many places would improve crops considerably.

Industrialization.

Most of the products raised by the natives are prepared entirely by hand, and only a relatively small number of mills or factories exist. The usual method of preparation of products such as palm nuts and palm oil, rubber, coffee, etc. entails much waste and results in an inferior product. In addition there are many complaints from abroad of the manner of packing and shipment, which is also often primitive.

There do exist a few factories for pressing palm oil (the Compagnie Française d'Afrique, and Trechot); the Ottino tapioca factory; cotton gins which treat the entire cotton crop; coffee mills at Sangha and in the Oubangui region. But there is still a great lack, particularly for the preparation of palm oil. Preparation of this product by hand gives a yield of only 6 to 8% of the weight handled, whereas mechanical extraction would double this ratio.

It is anticipated that the new welfare societies will be an important element in spreading the use of mechanical methods among the natives. Practically

all machinery, tools, and such equipment that may be put into use would of course have to be imported.

Source of Information.

Journal Officiel de l'Afrique Equatoriale Française
of December 1, 1937 - report by Governor General.

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NOTE

SEE 125.6976/338 FOR #

FROM France (Bullitt) DATED Jan. 12, 1938
TO NAME 1-1127 ***

REGARDING: French Colonial reports; The Paris office, notwithstanding the distance involved and because many of the colonial administrations are represented here, is in best position to obtain information concerning developments in the French colonies.

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